



## ***Learning in Progress: Yellowstone County***

### **Military Youth Finding “Resiliency on the Trail”**

Why can some children who endure overwhelming adversities grow up to be independent, contributing members of our community? The answer...Resiliency!

“Resiliency on the Trail” was one of six camps in 2012 hosted by the Montana Operation Military Kids (OMK) program. OMK is a national partnership between 4-H and the Department of Defense that was established in 2004 to support youth of military families. Over 200 Montana military youth participated in these camps across the state.

At the 3-day camp held in Yellowstone County, participants joined the “Corp of Discovery” and were each given a journal to begin their journey. Campers discovered that the bravery and survival skills used by those in the Lewis & Clark Expedition are also used by their families today. Campers listened as stories were shared about the men and one woman, Sacajawea, who ate bark from trees to survive, how the “Corps” utilized Native American skills to navigate unknown territories, and why they learned to build a “buffalo boat” for transportation after all of their horses had been stolen.

Fun, hands-on workshops on teambuilding, communication, and coping were highlights at this camp. Youth were taught positive youth development and resiliency skills, learning how to positively deal with and reduce stress in their lives when a family member is deployed. These skills will help children lead more productive lives at home, in school and in their communities.



Montana has over 6,500 military youth across the state. The Yellowstone County 4-H/Military program and the 4-H Center for Youth Development are committed to continuing a local support network for these youth and families of the service men and women in our state.

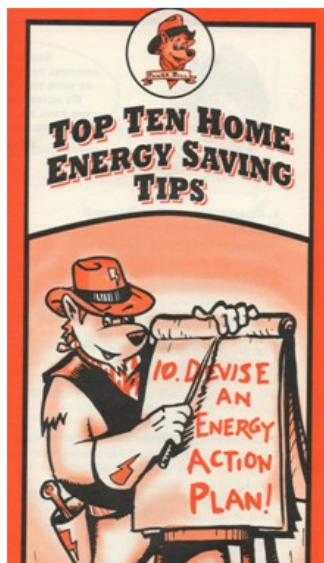
### **Maintaining Their Investment for First Time Home Buyers**

Owning your own home is the American dream, but is difficult for many to attain because of lack of money for the down payment. Down payment assistance programs are available to individuals with lower to moderate incomes who qualify. To qualify they must complete a First Time Home Buyer Program consisting of eight hours of instruction that address a variety of topics to prepare individuals for the home buying process, and the responsibilities of home ownership. Program topics include: Money Management, Working with a Realtor, Working with a Lender, How Much Home Can You Afford, The Importance of the Home Inspector, and others. An important topic covered in the

workshop, Maintaining Your Home and Investment, is taught by MSU Yellowstone County Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, Bernie Mason.

During the Maintaining Your Home and Investment session, the participants learn about preventative measures they can take to avoid more costly home repairs, such as preventing damage from mold, keeping the gutters cleaned, repairing peeling paint, cleaning up after their pets, and maintaining the furnace for energy efficiency.

Participants receive information on factors to consider before making decisions about whether to make home repairs themselves or to have the work completed by a professional. They are given information on how to work with a professional contractor. The participants are also provided with resources from the MSU Extension Housing Program on how to repair some of their own plumbing problems



(fixing a leaky faucet or cleaning a clogged drain) and electrical repairs, (replacing a ceiling light to rewiring an electrical outlet). Topics also address the most appropriate methods to use when painting the home, caring for its exterior, and ways to conserve home energy.

Two First Time Home Buyer workshops are offered each month in Yellowstone County. In the past year 214 individuals have completed the program in Billings, with another 191 completing the program in Laurel. Many of the

Laurel participants come from communities outside of Yellowstone County. A large percentage of the workshop evaluations rated the Maintaining Your Home and Investment session as the most beneficial session. The information taught is practical, has potential cost savings for the homeowner in maintaining their large investment, and is very useful as individuals begin their venture into home ownership.

## Yellowstone County Master Gardener Association ~ First in the State of Montana

In 2012, the Yellowstone County Master Gardener program had a record breaking year with its largest class of 120 participants. Because of increasing numbers and needs, Level 3 Master Gardeners decided to take the program to the next level. Level 3 Master Gardeners have passed Level 1 and Level 2 course exams, have been dedicated participants in the local program, and have been selected to take special training from Toby Day – MSU Horticulture Specialist/State Master Gardener Coordinator.

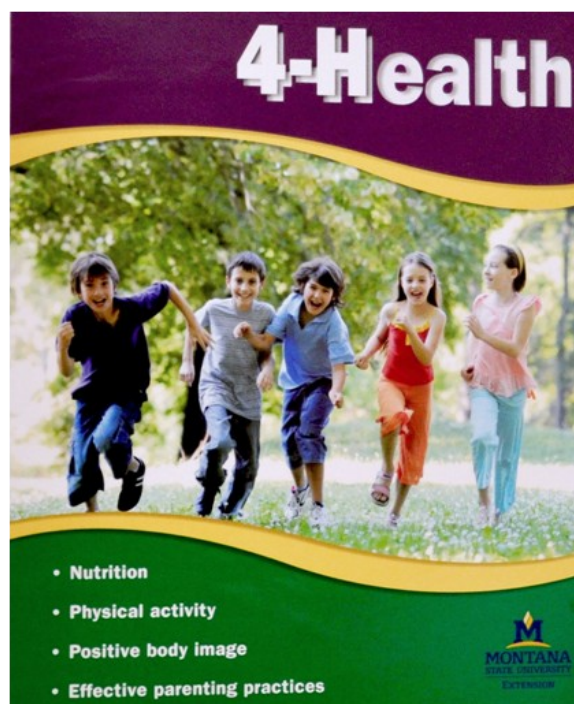
In order to expand the program and provide a more effective outreach to the community, the Yellowstone County Master Gardener Association was created. It is the first of its kind in Montana. These dedicated Level 3 Master Gardeners worked diligently to establish the bylaws for the association and filed Articles of Incorporation in January 2012. The Association is currently waiting for a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt designation, which will provide the opportunity to pursue grant money. The Association will investigate local sources of funding as well as funding offered out of state.

Projects the Association wants to spearhead include:

- Financial assistance for community gardens.
- Scholarships for Master Gardener class participants.
- Marketing MSU Extension and Master Gardener programs.
- Identifying community opportunities for Master Gardener volunteers.
- Offering additional Master Gardener programs throughout Yellowstone County.

As the Association grows, their goal is to obtain funding for the purchase of land on which to construct a facility to hold Master Gardener classes, the building of a greenhouse and planting demonstration gardens.

## 4-H Health



4-Health is a project to promote health and prevent diseases by teaching food and nutrition, physical activity, body image and parenting. It is designed for rural Montana parents of 8–12 year old 4-H youth. The research and education grant from USDA included learning objectives for parents to obtain current knowledge regarding healthy diets, physical activity, and improved body image for their children.

The project goal was to change the behaviors of parents and children in order to promote health and well-being while reducing the risk of chronic diseases. In Yellowstone County five families completed the program in hopes of enhancing their parental understanding, skills, and potential roles as positive change agents (parenting and behavior management skills).



Being involved in a group where they could meet and talk about common issues was important to all of the parents. The five parents became a support group for each other and looked forward to meeting together. They discovered they were not alone in dealing with special concerns with raising their children. Commonalities included their kids not wanting to eat vegetables, bullying issues and body image challenges.

As a result of this year-long project, the following items of interest were notable:

- Parents reported that their children were eating more vegetables than they had previously.
- After learning how to make more healthy food choices, one girl suggested to her fellow 4-H members that they make low-fat substitutions for treats prepared for club meetings.
- Utilizing what was learned in the well-being session on dealing with bullying, one participating family decided to take on a special fundraising project to buy Kindle Readers for non-4-H students in a local school who were being bullied because of their lack of reading ability.
- The families that were involved increased their physical activity level as well as the variety of activities the family participated in.

## Severe Drought in Yellowstone County

A severe drought settled on Yellowstone County this year creating hardships for many of our agricultural producers. The months of June, July and August were the second driest summer months ever recorded by the National Weather Service. During that three month period, just .93 inches of precipitation was recorded. Only 1988 proved to be drier with .59 inches of precipitation. Extreme high temperatures were the fourth warmest on record, causing additional challenges for producers.

Yellowstone County usually averages 29 days above 90 degrees, but this summer there were 47 days. The heat proved to be a major disaster for the dryland producers, who were subjected to severe shortages of forage and water. Dryland hay was almost non-existent and grazing forages were severely damaged. Approximate losses to dryland hay were 80% and grazing forages 70%. Because it appeared much of the spring dryland grain crop was going to be lost, many producers decided to produce hay from their spring grain crops.

High nitrate concentrations can be a concern when making hay out of grain crops. High nitrates can cause cows to abort fetuses or even die if concentrations are too high. MSU Yellowstone County Agricultural Extension Agent Steve Lackman was called upon to provide nitrate testing to determine the safety of feeding forages. The loss of dryland grazing forages was also detrimental. As the price of hay skyrocketed to nearly \$200 per ton before transportation expenses were added, Steve was active in the county inspecting rangeland to determine the health of pastures and amount of forage available for livestock. MSU Extension was a valuable partner to Ag producers in Yellowstone County as feed shortages became extreme.



**Photo shows minimal spring wheat harvest residue resulting from extreme drought. Stem growth is less than half of normal.**

A letter from Extension Ag Agent Lackman was a contributing factor in a decision by the Yellowstone County Commissioners to declare Yellowstone County a disaster area. The Commissioners were also concerned about the fire danger the drought was imposing. Crop status testimony was given by agricultural producers to the Commissioners in order to start the process of disaster designations. Additionally, the opening of CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) for haying and grazing proved to be helpful in supplying feed to producers that lost feed to drought and fires.

## Nutrition Classes Help Those on Limited Income

The Montana State University Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) continues to teach Yellowstone County families how to stretch limited resources while giving their families safe and nutritious meals. The messages have changed with research, but after nearly 45 years the program is still helping families. In the last program year, 390 participants completed the series of seven nutrition classes benefiting 1,229 family members.

A husband and wife attended a class at the Salvation Army. The entire family is overweight. The mother had just been diagnosed with diabetes. The family started making changes immediately after the first class. Within a few weeks the 10 year old son went from 100 to 90 pounds and he was excited about the changes in his eating habits.



**Participants in the EFNEP class Cooking for Healthy Eating. Attendees meet once a week for one and one half hours for seven weeks.**

One young pregnant mother signed up for the series of classes at WIC. She is living with her mother and hoping to get out on her own soon. She learned to make healthier choices at the grocery store and improved her cooking skills. The next week, she brought her twin sister who is pregnant, has a two year old daughter and lives with her grandmother. They look forward each week to trying the new foods we prepare.

EFNEP also teaches a series of 6 classes to children in grades one, three and five in schools where 50% of the students receive free and reduced lunches. Last year 1,051 students participated in those programs. One EFNEP instructor was at the swimming pool when a young boy said, "I know you! You are the vegetable lady." Another instructor ran into a parent at the grocery store whose son was in the classes and shared that her son had been more willing to eat fruits and vegetables.

Evaluations conducted at the beginning and end of both the adult and youth programs indicate that positive changes have resulted in healthier eating habits and lifestyles. Money for EFNEP comes from federal sources within the USDA Farm Bill. During the 2012 Program Year Yellowstone County received \$157,000 for EFNEP funding.

## Contact Us



### Yellowstone County

[www.msuextension.org](http://www.msuextension.org)

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